11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

mentions that at one time the people of Inishkea were much noted for it, and that the fate of the two men, who some time in the last century ruined themselves in a lawsuit about a sheep, became proverbial, and litigants were warned to remember the fate of "Malley and Malone." C. O.[1] also refers to this peculiarity, which nowadays seems to be more characteristic of the mainland people than the islanders. 691

In the course of the cases arising from this tendency, many curious examples of ingenious cross-swearing occur. Intoxication is rather prevalent on fair days and holidays, and at weddings and other festive occasions, but at ordinary times there is not much of it among the country people. They appear to be conscientious in their religious observances, and depend much on the guidance and advice of their clergy. 181 [273] [771]

As will be judged from the extent and variety of their folk-lore, they have a great love for the supernatural and mystical. [789]

As regards morals, though illegitimacy is by no means unknown, yet, when the size of the population is taken into account, it is so rare as to be very creditable to the moral tone of the people.[2] [848]

A stand-up fight rarely occurs when men quarrel, there may be one or two blows struck, or stone-throwing may be indulged in, but disputes do not usually get beyond cursing and vituperation. [578]

As parents they are affectionate, but careless and unequal in their treatment of their children, at one time over indulging them, and at another punishing severely for a slight fault. [855]

With regard to industry, but little can be said in their favour, though energetic by starts, during which they are capable of a great deal of work, accounts agree in stating that they dislike steady occupation, and are indolent. It should be remembered, however, that there has hitherto been but little inducement to them to cultivate steady industry. The women seem always to have plenty of work on hand, and to do it. 461 181

In this district, as in many others, the people are not very careful in their re-payment of debts, and shopkeepers do not now give credit to the same extent as formerly. As to rent and cess, to the payment of these, too, a strong aversion is often manifested. 181 426

Many of their habits are not over cleanly, though this is largely due to the wretched nature of their houses, and a strict regard for truth is not a prominent part of their character. 181 515 577

[1] "Sketches in Erris and Tyrawley."

[2] The total number of cases which occurred between the years 1884 and 1893 was 18.

HARVEST

When the scythe was transferred from the mowing of hay 243
to the cutting of corn during the second half of last century 412
there was much opposition from the reapers, sometimes for the 178
good reason that little fields full of great boulders or the stumps
of bog-fir gave no space to swing a scythe, and a single blow on
the fast-moving point may ruin the blade. But one suspects that
conservatism was rooted in magic. It is said that the rice-
growers of Malaya refuse to use a scythe because its slashing
motion would frighten away the spirits of the rice. Some such
notion may have strengthened the Irishman's condemnation of
the scythe. And I find another curious parallel with the Far East.
The Malayan reaper hums like an insect while he is cutting the
rice, perhaps to soothe the spirits of the living crop. In Ireland
there is an old belief that an insect kept in a little box fastened
to the handle of hook or scythe will bring luck and give the
blade greater cutting power. Both scythe and sickle are personal
possessions and their luck is personal: they are loaned with [422]
reluctance. When a sickle is borrowed it should not be passed [426]
directly from hand to hand but thrown on the ground and then
picked up. This belief, which applies to all pointed objects,
may be explained by the danger of handling a sharp tool, for
bad luck is often related to bad practice.

But before coming to corn harvest the handling of flax should 248
be described. Unpleasant handling it is, even if not quite so
onerous (and odorous) as working with hemp or jute. When
grown for fibre flax is harvested after the pale blue flowers
have fallen but before the seed ripens, and because it is the
stalk that is being harvested it is not cut but pulled up by the
roots. 'Lint' is a crop of the small family farm, for many hands
are required, teams or 'boons' of anything from half a dozen to [476]
thirty people gathering from neighbouring farms and working
together in a festival spirit which reaches its climax in the
evening dance. The tough flax is hard on the hands and the
stooping is back-breaking. But the beets (sheaves) are carefully
put together, for they have to be spread after retting and the
stalks should lie evenly. The three handfuls which compose the
beet are laid down at slightly different angles so that they will
separate easily. A standard beet is reckoned to be 22 inches in
diameter. The bands (ties) are prepared beforehand and consist [284]

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

with me in my research; thus, I am forced to depend on data about his career provided me by his neighbors. It is hard to disentangle fact from hearsay in these materials, for he arouses extremes of feeling among islanders which can prompt distortions of information. I was told by several respondents—bitter foes of the king—that he conceives of himself as the moral guardian of the folk "who knows what is best for them;" he believes them to possess a childlike mentality and outlook on the world which necessitate his guidance (In talking with these respondents, who referred to the king as "the little priest," I was reminded of interviews in Africa seven years earlier concerning particular British colonial administrators, who conceived of their relationship with the Nigerians in like manner.).

A personable man of great charm, the king has a measure of charisma which commands deference and respect, and it is said that had he chosen to become a priest or businessman on the mainland, he would now be a bishop or captain of industry. His business acumen is acclaimed, and many have become his customers because they believe him to be more "clever" than city merchants and well able to deal with them to the advantage of the islanders. The sources of his power are many. He began his career as a shopkeeper in the 1920s, with money provided him by a brother living in the United States (or, as claimed by some, with the insurance money that he received as a beneficiary when his brother was killed while serving in the armed forces of this country). Two brothers older than himself—the eldest the landholder—live in Inis Beag with large families, and he has their support and that of his many other kin. He gained a large following during the depression years of the 1930s by extending credit to customers for months without charging interest; many folk still show gratitude for this gesture by buying only from him and by acquiescing to many of his wishes, although covertly they may resent being in his debt and under his influence. He is a friend of priests, politicians, and civil servants, who usually reside in his guest house when visiting Inis Beag, and he is a political activist in behalf of "Dev" and Fianna Fail. Another source of his power is the fact that he cashes most of the checks and changes most of the foreign currency received by the islanders, and thus knows of sources and amounts of income; it is feared that he might inform government officials of remittances and as a result jeopardize the old age and dole of any who earn his displeasure.

The king is most criticized for his "great riches," which arouse envy and jealousy in his neighbors. From time to time, rumors as to the amount of money deposited to his account in a mainland bank pass around Inis Beag, and arouse discussion of the bill of particulars against him. His involvement in the salvaging of the cargo of the grounded freighter brought to the surface all of the hostility toward him felt by the folk. He is supposed to have pooled his resources with several businessmen "from the city" to purchase the most valuable items of the cargo for resale at a "vast profit;" to safeguard these items until they could be salvaged and shipped off on the steamer, he consorted with owners of the steamship company, customs officials, the guards, and even the curate to prevent the islanders ("who only saved the lives of the crew") from observing the law of wrack and thereby reducing his profit. It is held that he persuaded the curate to deliver sermons denouncing the "looting" of the ship as sinful, and he allowed his